

The John Craig House
Near Freehold, Monmouth County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

The John Craig House
Near Freehold, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Owners: Mr. and Mrs. Samuel C. Cowart

Dates of Erection: 1704-1717 for minor unit;
1747 for major unit

Architects: Unknown

Builders: John Craig (d. 1724) and Samuel Craig
(1708-1747)

Present Condition: Original, unaltered

Number of Stories: One and one-half, two and one-half with part
Materials of Construction: cellar

Foundation - stone masonry

Exterior walls - timber frame, brick filled,
sheathed by original round-butt shingles
on north front and by clapboards over which
are modern shingles on east, west and part
of north front

Interior walls - double framed timber party
wall, brick filled, between the two units,
and plank partitions beaded or plastered

Chimneys - brick, built into inside of gable
end walls

Roof - gable and leanto, modern wood shingled

Historical Data:

The following quoted reference to an historical event connected with this house was published in 1904^(a)
"There is an interesting tradition connected with the old John Craig farmhouse now owned by Samuel Craig Coward and Enoch L. Cowart, the location of which is shown on the map of the Battle Ground in this chapter. John Craig was in the American Army on the day of the battle (of Monmouth, 28 June 1778), and left his wife and his one child Amelia and two slaves at the old farmhouse. As soon as Mrs. Craig

(a) F. R. Symmes, History of the Old Tennent Church,
1904, p. 108

heard the British were likely to join battle with the American forces near the old farm, she packed her household goods in two wagons and with her child and two slaves rode toward Upper Freehold in the direction from which the British Army had come, thus expecting to avoid molestation. Before leaving the farmhouse she took her silver and placing it in a kettle, sunk it in the open well.----- The iron kettle is now in possession of Mr. Samuel C. Cowart of Freehold, who is a great grandson of John Craig. This farm has been in possession of Mr. Cowart and his maternal ancestors for two hundred years. The house is located about one mile west of Freehold, near Hartshorne's Mill. A number of British soldiers were buried back of the house. Lord Stirling's artillery was placed on the high piece of ground on the westerly side of the farm, and there is a tradition that two cannon of the British were sunk in the meadow in the retreat from the Battle." The map of Monmouth Battlefield mentioned appears opposite page 104, and shows a house marked "John Craig. British Hospital", on the north side of a brook, being obviously the house here surveyed.

The identification of the original and subsequent owners of this farmhouse by contemporary documentary evidence has been found possible by search of title made in the County records and is reported as follows:

By deed of 4 May 1704, Allen Colowell of Freehold Township, Monmouth County, conveyed to

John Craig^(b) of Amboy, Middlesex County, a tract of land "being part of a farm that did belong to James Johnston, and one headland of Christian Cheen, purchased of her by James Johnston, adjacent to the said farm at Topanemus" in Freehold Township, describing the first tract thus:

(b) In a list of 54 names of persons imported from Scotland to Perth Amboy in December 1685 by Lord Neill Campbell, appear those of John, James, Archibald and Ursula Craige, the list being recorded in Liber A, page 225 of East Jersey records (abstract publ. in N.J. Archives XXI, 60). By deed of 11 June 1690, George Keith, Surveyor General of the Province of East New Jersey, conveyed to John Craig of Middlesex County, 150 acres on the south shore of Raritan River (Ibid. XXI, 188) which was evidently the same tract exchanged in 1704 for one in Freehold as described in the text above. The election returns of 12 Oct. 1693 showed John Barclay and John Craige members for Perth Amboy in the General Assembly of the Province (Ibid. 159). By deed of 9 Dec. 1695, Wm. Dockwra of London conveyed to John Craig of Middlesex County a lot at Topanemus, Freehold Twp., Monmouth Co., bounded E. by Wm. Laying, S.W. by Spotswood Brook, and W. by land not laid out (Ibid. 231) and the said Craig, being still of Amboy, Middx. Co., conveyed the same to his son Archibald by deed of 10 Apr. 1702 (Ibid. 150). John Craig had moved to Freehold Twp., Mon. Co., by 1705, in which year he and others applied to the court for registration of Scots Meeting House near Topanemus. (Stymer, cited in (a)).

Beginning on the North brook at the east corner of that (tract) late of said Johnston and running up the brook 22 chains, thence southwest by west 17 chains, thence northwest by north 22 chains, thence southwest by west along the line of said Johnston's farm to the old South brook 35 chains, thence down the said South brook 2 chains to a black oak tree marked by the west side of a small run and about East northeast by the run 9 chains, thence up a hollow betwixt two small risings of ground to a stake standing on the north side of the Path which goes from said Johnston's House toward the falls of Shrewsbury and about a chain west from the parting of the path with another path leading to the House late of John Campbell, the course about East northeast 17 chains, thence north by west 21 chains to a stake standing on the North brook a chain below a gully, thence up the brook 25 chains to where it began, bounded eastwardly by the land late of John Campbell, westwardly by the farm late of said Johnston. The other tract begins at the southwest corner of said Johnston's farm, being the meeting of the two brooks, and running down along the brook north northwest 32 chains, thence east northeast 10 chains, thence south southeast 35 chains to a brook, thence down that brook to where it began, bounded south and southeast by the brook, and west and north by the said farm, the acreage not stated. This tract is conveyed to said John Craig in exchange for his 150 acres of land on the bank of Raritan River, in the town of Perth Amboy. (On which he was then residing, apparently. The grantee, John Craig, must have built a house between the years 1704-1705 on the tract thus acquired. He had removed to the township in that year.

By deed of 2 September 1717, the grantee John Craig, of Freehold Township, Monmouth County, conveyed to his son Archibald Craig of the same place, for 100 Pounds, the "tract or plantation where I dwell", and the other tract, which "were assigned to me by deed of Allen Colowell the 4 May 1704", as above abstracted.

Having thus transferred his homestead farm to his son Archibald in 1717, John Craig, the emigrant progenitor of this family being still of Freehold, and supposedly residing with the son, made his will on 5 October 1721 (proved 27 November 1724) in which he devised personal property only to his sons James and Archibald, and to his granddaughter Ursula, daughter of Elisha Parker late of Amboy, merch., and appointed the son Archibald as executor. The inventory of the personal estate amounted to some 125 Pounds, the items listed including a bible, looking glass, sermon book, a psalter and a bond for 110 Pounds(c). Probably John Craig, who is thus known to have died 1721-1724, was buried in the old Scots graveyard (as was his son Archibald), the site of the original Presbyterian meeting house of 1692, about two miles northwest Topanemus, which was succeeded in 1830 by the Tennent Church some five miles south thereof and near his farm.

Archibald² Craig, (d) of Freehold Township, son and grantee of John Craig as abovesaid, in his will dated 25 February 1750/1 and proved 24 April 1751, after making devises to his wife Mary and children viz., John, William, Ursula Forman widow, Sarah wife of John Anderson, Hannah wife of William Crawford, Mary wife of Peter Gordon, Catherine wife of John Lloyd, and Elizabeth wife of John Gordon, as also to his grand children Walter and Margaret Kerr, and John, Elizabeth, Ursula and Mary (the children of his deceased son Samuel Craig), makes this bequest (quote).

(c) Abstracts of the will and inventory publ. in N.J. Archives XXIII, 118

(d) Archibald Craig born 1672 in Scotland, came with father to Perth Amboy in 1685, to Freehold Twp. 1704 and died 6 March 1751 aged 73 yrs.; his wife Mary Craig 1st Nov. 1752 aged 69; both buried at Old Scots Cemetery near Topanemus, now in Marlborough Twp. (Symmes, cited supra, pp. 462-3).

"Item-----I give and bequeath unto my grandson, John Craig, son of Samuel Craig deceased, all that tract of land which was granted unto me by Deed of sale by my father, John Craig, 2 September 1717" (q.v. above) Testator also devises the land on the north side of Spottswood Brook as granted by his father by deed of 2 April 1702, two lots at Middletown Point "where the landing is", also land bought of Jacob Sutphin 24 April 1733^(c). The inventory of his personal estate was taken on 27 April 1751, valued at 353 Pounds, the items including books and pamphlets at 3 Pounds and two negroes at 56 Pounds^(e).

John⁴ Craig^(f), son of Samuel³ Craig^(g) and devisee of the ancestral homestead in 1751 as abovesaid, held the same and by his will of 16 December 1817, as John Craig Sr. of Freehold Township, devised "To my beloved son Jonathan Craig one-half of the farm or plantation where I now live, to be divided according to quantity and quality.....To my beloved daughters, Mary and Amelia, share and share alike, to their heirs and assigns, the remaining half of the plantation on which I now live, forever".

(c) Abstract of will and inventory are publ. in N.J. Archives XXXII, 77.

(f) John Craig d. 11 July 1824 in 87th yr., his wife Ann 11 March 1824 in 86th yr., per gravestones in Old Scots cem., 5 miles north of Tennent Church. His children as named in his will and in the deed of 23 Dec. 1839, cited in the text above, were Samuel, Jonathan who d. 10 Apr. 1840 aged 73, Mary who d. 9 Sept. 1839, aged 65 unm., and Amelia Bowne. (F.R. Symmes, History of Old Tennent Church, 1904, p. 268).

(g) Samuel³ Craig d. 17 Nov. 1746, aged 38-8-14, mar. by license dated 8 Nov. 1736 Gertrude Ward (who mar. 2ndly. 1747 Wm. Hamton, widr.) and had children viz., Samuel (?), John abovesaid, William d. 1743, Ursilla and Mary, and of whom exc. Samuel were baptised in Tennent Presbyterian Church (Symmes, cited in (d), p. 463). The inventory of the estate of Samuel Craig of Monm. Co., dec'd. intestate, taken 3 Feb. 1746/7, amounted to some 493 Pounds valuation, the items incl. a negro boy, silver tankard, instruments and materials for making clocks and watches, and materials for finishing a new house, as listed by the widow Gertrude Craig and others (N.J. Archives XXX, 121). This last item may refer to the main unit of the house here surveyed.

One of the two daughters and devisees, Mary Craig, having died unmarried, her surviving brothers and heirs, Jonathan and Samuel Craig, gave their deed of 23 December 1839 quitclaiming their interest in her share of their father, John Craig's estate, to the other sister Amelia Bowne. In this transaction, a West Farm of 107, an East Farm of 37, and a Middle Farm of 154 acres were concerned.

By deed of 17 November 1882, Anna M. Cowart describing herself as sole heir of her mother Amelia Bowne (abovesaid), with her husband Enoch L. Cowart of Freehold Township, conveyed to their son Samuel C. Cowart the East Farm. By a deed of 25 January 1890, the said Anna Maria Cowart, widow, of Freehold, conveyed also the West Farm to her son, and by deed of 13 June 1908, Enoch L. Cowart and wife Mary E., of Asbury Park, conveyed to him the "Middle Farm", of 154 acres on which stands the venerable homestead here considered. The said Samuel C. Cowart and wife Florence L., of Freehold, remain owners thereof at the time of our survey of the house in 1939, but it is occupied by negro tenants.

Architectural Analysis:

Obviously the older part of this house is the lesser unit which we have assigned to John Craig 1704-1717. In the back room of this it is clear (from the fact of the now useless passage door to the main unit being directly over the open stairwell) that the floor has been removed and excavation made to transform the room into its present use as a "cold cellar". The grilled windows there were set at that time to replace the original and wider windows whose jambs are

still apparent on the inside of the wall. The leanto was a subsequent addition, built against the end wall whose clapboard covering still appears in the shed thus formed. "Materials for a new house" were listed in the inventory of Samuel Craig deceased 1747 and we have accordingly assigned the main unit to him.

Bibliography:

Search of title in the Land and Probate records of Monmouth County and in those of the Provincial Secretary (now deposited with the Secretary of State) by Forrest N. Hargrove, H.A.B.S. abstractor, report received 16 January 1940

Lewis D. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
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District Officer